

I recently expressed my concern with the fresh water discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie Estuary in a letter I authored to Colonel Alfred Pantano of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that was also signed by Florida Senators Bill Nelson and George LeMieux and Florida Representatives Tom Rooney and Bill Posey. The letter urges the Corps to find a way to better address the need to lower the water-level in the lake while minimizing the harm freshwater discharges impart on the environment and economy of the surrounding area. **(Please find the letter below and attached).**

May 21, 2010

Colonel Alfred A. Pantano, Jr.  
Commander, Jacksonville District  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
701 San Marco Boulevard  
Jacksonville, Florida 32207

Dear Colonel Pantano:

We write in order to express our concern with the recent fresh water discharges from Lake Okeechobee into the St. Lucie Estuary. As you know, the estuary and Indian River Lagoon are sensitive coastal areas and a crucial environmental and economic resource for Martin County and surrounding areas. Therefore, we urge you to consider the environmental and economic ramifications of the large releases from Lake Okeechobee.

The fresh water from the lake desalinates the water of the estuary, killing much of the flora and fauna, including fish and oysters crucial for many area businesses. The tourist and fishing charter businesses suffer when the St. Lucie River and the Indian River Lagoon become so polluted that signs are posted to avoid contact with the water. Martin County is within one of the most bio-diverse areas of North America. There is a limit to how much of these releases the estuary can tolerate.

We know that the Corps must balance many interests in determining when and how much lake water is sent into the estuaries. We urge you to fully address the interests of those impacted by these releases.

By completing the projects set forth in the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, we believe that it will help prevent water from going into the lake.

For example, the C-44 Reservoir component of the Indian River Lagoon CERP project will greatly reduce stormwater runoff from the St. Lucie basin. This will give the estuary some relief. In fact, at present, in dry seasons, some of that basin runoff is actually returned to the lake, making its problems worse.

We understand the responsibilities of the Corps and appreciate the difficult decisions it faces, however, we must emphasize that the effects of the Corps' decisions reverberate out to local businesses and families. Thank you for your time and consideration and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress

George LeMieux  
United States Senator

Bill Posey  
Member of Congress

Bill Nelson  
United States Senator

Tom Rooney  
Member of Congress

Cc: Terrence C. "Rock" Salt, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army  
Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works

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 [LETTER Colonel Pantano Lake O discharges St. Lucie Estuary.pdf](#)